

Commander's Call Topics



February 6, 2014

"Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome."

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)
American educator
Founder, Tuskegee Institute

The U.S. Census Bureau
has compiled facts and figures
for
[African American History Month](#)

Tuskegee 'Experiment' Catalyst for Military Desegregation

National African American History Month observance celebrates 50 years since President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. For the Air Force, the moment that had the largest significance toward equality for African Americans took place on a bare-bones airfield in central Alabama during the summer of 1941.

An initial group of 13 young African Americans, who dreamt of serving their country fighting as pilots shortly before the outbreak of the second world war, converged on the Tuskegee Institute to begin an experiment by senior Army leaders to teach black Airmen to become pilots.

But many of those young men saw the training as an opportunity to overcome much of the racism and bigotry prevalent in society at the time. "We just loved the airplane, but we knew segregation at that time was the rule of the world," said Dr. Roscoe C. Brown, Jr., a Tuskegee Airman who graduated in 1944. He would later command the 100th Fighter Squadron and shoot down German Me-262 jets from his P-51 Mustang.

"People who never grew up during segregation can't realize how rigid it was," Brown said. "You could go as high as you could in the black community, but you couldn't go nearly as high in the white community. Opportunities were denied to you and you had no recourse. That was why the NAACP and the civil rights movement got started back in the 1920's and '30s. That was the struggle the people of my generation went through."

According to historical documents, if the white military leadership had their way, the experiment to train black men as pilots would have been a failed one. They believed blacks lacked the coordination, intelligence and leadership to be pilots. "Experiments within the Army in the solution of social problems are fraught with dangers to efficiency, discipline and morale," wrote Army Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall in a 1941 letter.

Fortunately President Franklin D. Roosevelt was concerned about the black vote in the 1940 presidential election, and announced the Civil Pilot Training Act that would allow African Americans to be trained as military pilots.

Of that initial group of 13 black students at Tuskegee, only six would go on to be pilots, including Capt. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., who would go on to become the Air Force's first African American general. But by the end of World War II, close to 1,000 pilots and more than 16,000 support Airmen would graduate from Tuskegee. On July 26, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981 ending segregation within the armed forces.

► TRENDING...

"What you're doing here is important for our two countries; it's important for NATO, it's important for freedom, and it is a significant symbol around the world," [Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said when he visited with U.S. and Polish airmen](#) from the 52nd Operations Group Aviation Detachment at Powidz Air Base, Poland.

► RESOURCES

Website access to the following resources can be gained by clicking on the name.

[AF.mil](#)

[Airman magazine](#)

[Military OneSource/HomeFront](#)

[Air Force Personnel Center](#)

[Air Reserve Personnel Center](#)

[Department of Defense News](#)

[Department of Veteran Affairs](#)

[TRICARE](#)

[U.S. Government Website](#)

[Air Force Association Scholarships](#)

[Air Force Safety Center](#)

[Civil Service Employment Opportunities](#)

[NAF Employment Opportunities](#)

[Air Force Bands/Outreach](#)

► THIS WEEK IN AIR FORCE HISTORY

Feb. 6, 1967 – Airman 2nd Class Duane Hackney, the most decorated airman in Vietnam, received an Air Force Cross for rescuing a downed pilot near Mu Gia pass, N. Vietnam.

Feb. 7, 1999 - From Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla., a Delta II rocket launched carrying the first spacecraft designed to intercept a comet and bring samples back to earth. The spacecraft was named Stardust.

Feb. 8, 1908 - The Secretary of War approved bids by the Wright brothers, Augustus M. Herring, and James F. Scott to build the U.S. Army's first plane.

Feb. 9, 1972 - The Boeing EC-137D test-bed aircraft for the Air Force's Airborne Warning and Control System made its first flight.

Feb. 10, 1939 - The North American NA-40 first flew. This was the prototype for the B-25 Mitchell bomber.

Feb. 11, 1944 - Eighth Air Force conducted a radar bombing attack on important German chemical plants.

Feb. 12, 1958 - The Department of Defense transferred the Jupiter Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile program from the Army to the Air Force.

► CURRENT ISSUES

[Air Force addresses aspects of compromised test materials](#)

Stressing that the investigation of cheating on proficiency exams by nuclear launch officers at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont., [Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James](#) and [Lt. Gen. Stephen W. Wilson](#), the commander of the Global Strike Command, announced a holistic approach that will allow Airmen the opportunity to identify and solve problems that are affecting the culture, climate and working environment of the nuclear enterprise.

[CSAF to Airmen: Stay focused](#)

In a 90-second video, "Airman to Airman," [Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III](#) stresses the importance of staying focused to continue to be "the best trained Air Force on the planet."

► FAMILY HEALTH AND SAFETY

[Family care plans offer the next best thing when you cannot be there](#)

Short- and long-term care plans support the service person and his/her family with written guidance when military obligations require an Airman to be away from home for training, mobilization or deployment.

► PERSONNEL ISSUES

[Air Force introduces Volume VIII of Portraits in Courage](#)

Three teams and thirteen Airmen, representing multiple career fields, are recognized for their honor, valor, devotion, selfless sacrifice and talent.

For more information on Air Force heritage, visit <http://www.airforcehistory.af.mil>

The Defense Media Activity produces **Commander's Call Topics** weekly. For questions or comments about this, or any other DMA product, send an e-mail to afproducts@dma.mil.

Subscribe to AF news and information products online, go to <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDODAF/subscriber/new>